

In the Claims:

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions and listings of the claims in this application.

Listing of Claims

1. (Original) Use of HCVp7, a variant, functionally effective fragment or a mutation thereof in screening candidate compounds that inhibit or increase ion channel activity.
2. (Original) Use according to claim 1 wherein HCVp7 is coupled to a poly(amino acid) sequence.
3. (Currently Amended) Use according to claim 2 wherein the poly(amino acid) sequence linker comprises a basic natural amino acid selected from the group ~~comprising~~ consisting of ARG, LYS ~~or~~ and HIS.
4. (Currently Amended) Use according to ~~either~~ claim 2 ~~or claim 3~~ wherein the poly(amino acid) sequence is a polyHIS sequence.
5. (Original) Use according to claim 4 wherein the polyHIS sequence comprises at least 2 and up to 50 residues.
6. (Original) Use according to claim 5 wherein the polyHIS sequence comprises at least 2 and up to 10 residues
7. (Currently Amended) Use according to ~~any preceding~~ claim 1 wherein HCVp7 is incorporated into or comprised in a membrane.
8. (Original) Use according to claim 7 wherein the membrane is a black lipid membrane.

9. (Currently Amended) Use according to ~~any one of claim 1 to 6~~ claim 1 wherein a nucleic acid encoding the HCVp7 protein, variant, functionally effective fragment or a mutation thereof is incorporated into or comprised in a viral system.

10. (Currently Amended) A method of screening for compounds that inhibit or enhance ion channel activity comprising the steps of:

- (i) contacting a membrane comprising a HCVp7 protein or a viral system ~~including~~ comprising a nucleic acid encoding an HCVp7 protein with a candidate compound; and
- (ii) measuring ion channel activity across said membrane or in a viral system.

11. (Currently Amended) A method of screening a compound for efficacy of ~~inhibition~~ inhibition or enhanced ion channel activity comprising the steps of:

- (i) contacting a membrane comprising a HCVp7 protein or a viral system ~~including~~ comprising a nucleic acid encoding an HCVp7 protein with a candidate compound; and
- (ii) comparing the activity of said candidate compound with a standard.

12. (Canceled)

13. (Original) Use of HCVp7 in the assessment of ion channel formation by p7 variants and/or mutants thereof.

14. (Canceled)

15. (Currently Amended) A compound identified according to the method of ~~any one of claims 10 to 12~~ claim 10 to 12.

16. (Currently Amended) An antiviral therapeutic agent as identified by the method ~~any one of claims claim~~ 10 ~~to 12~~.

17. (Currently Amended) Use of a therapeutic agent identified by the method ~~any one of claims claim~~ 10 ~~to 12~~ in the preparation of a medicament for the treatment of a viral infection.

18. (Currently Amended) Use of a therapeutic agent identified by the method ~~any one of claims claim~~ 10 ~~to 12~~ in the preparation of a medicament for the treatment of hepatitis.

19. (Currently Amended) Use of a therapeutic agent identified by the method of ~~any one of claims claim~~ 10 ~~to 12~~ in the preparation of a medicament for the treatment of hepatitis C virus (HCV) infection.

20. (Original) Use of an antibody directed against HCVp7 as an inhibitor of channel ion activity, pharmaceutical preparations thereof and use therefor in the manufacture of a medicament for the treatment of hepatitis C virus (HCV) infection.

21. (Original) A membrane incorporating HCVp7, a variant, functionally effective fragment or a mutation thereof that retains ion channel forming capability.

22. (Canceled)

23. (Currently Amended) Use of a membrane according to ~~either claim 21 or 22~~ in screening candidate compounds that inhibit or increase ion channel activity.

24. (Currently Amended) Use of a membrane according to ~~any one of claims claim~~ 21 ~~to 23~~ in the method of ~~any one of claims claim~~ 10 ~~to 12~~.

25. (New) A compound identified according to the method of claim 11.

26. (New) An antiviral therapeutic agent as identified by the method of claim 11.
27. (New) Use of a therapeutic agent identified by the method of claim 11 in the preparation of a medicament for the treatment of a viral infection.
28. (New) Use of a therapeutic agent identified by the method of claim 11 in the preparation of a medicament for the treatment of hepatitis.
29. (New) Use of a therapeutic agent identified by the method of claim 11 in the preparation of a medicament for the treatment of hepatitis C virus (HCV) infection.
30. (New) Use of a membrane according to claim 21 in the method of claim 11.